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ABSTRACT

Report cards on schools have become common in many states, but their contents and formats vary widely. To study the variations and to determine if the differences in presentation have anything to do with presenting valuable data or with educational policy, a study was undertaken of the report cards of Southeastern states. Five states (Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee) provided report cards for review. These were analyzed for similarities and differences with regard to (1) instruments used to measure student performance; (2) student outcomes reported and reporting procedures; (3) levels of outcome data reported; (4) school and community factors reported; and (5) statistical procedures used in evaluating reported data. Evaluation reveals that analysis and presentation of outcome data are not consistent from state to state and appear to reflect the dictates of state policy. Student, school, and community characteristics reported also vary, and little attempt is made to determine relationships between characteristics and achievement. Only Florida and North Carolina attempt to use factors other than test results as indicators of student performance. Three tables and two figures present comparative results. (SLD)

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An Analysis of School Report Cards Used in Five Southeastern States

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AN ANALYSIS OF STATE REPORT CARDS ON SCHOOLS PRODUCED IN FIVE SOUTHEASTERN STATES

by Russell L. French and Gordon C. Bobbett*

I. INTRODUCTION

"Report cards" on schools have become common in many states. Their contents and formats vary from state to state. A cursory examination of the different reports suggests that the variations may have little to do with presenting data that are valuable to educators, policymakers, and parents in improving education and much to do with policy initiatives and the politics of education within the state. However, little detailed examination and comparison of report cards have been conducted. There is reason to believe that such an investigation could be useful to a number of persons. That assumption led to the study reported here.

II. METHODOLOGY

Requests for copies of report cards and explanatory information were made to all Southeastern states known to be publishing or developing report cards. Five states provided materials that were useable. They were Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Each report card and the accompanying information were analyzed for similarities and differences in five categories: 1) instruments used to measure student performance, 2) student outcomes reported and the procedures for reporting them, 3) levels of outcome data reported; i.e., district, school, grade level, classroom, 4) school and community factors reported, and 5) statistical procedures used in evaluating the data reported. Findings of the study are reported in each of these five categories.

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III. FINDINGS

Instruments Used To Measure Student Performance

As might be expected, instruments and procedures used to measure student performance differ from state to state. Table 1 displays the findings:

Table 1. Instruments Used to Measure Student Performance

STATE	INSTRUMENTS	COMMENTS
Florida	Grade Ten Assessment Test (GTAT) (Reading Comprehension, Math)	Percentage of students below the 25th percentile and above the 75th percentile reported.
	American College Test (ACT)	Percentage of students (by gender and race) taking test and median score for school reported.
	Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	Percentage of students (by gender and race) taking test and median score for school reported.
	Average Number of Students Per Computer	Used as an indicator of readiness to use technology.
	Completion of Upper Level Science and Math Courses	Percentage of students (by gender and race) reported
Georgia	Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA), Grades 3, 5, 8 (Language Arts, Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health)	Matrix sampling procedure used; scores reported by percentage of students in each quartile.
	Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Grades 3, 5, 8	Percentage of students in each quartile reported.
	Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) Grade 11 (Reading, Math, Written Expression, Science, Social Studies)	Reported in grade equivalents. NOTE: All scores are reported in 19 school system groupings based on school district size and percentage of students on free/reduced lunch.
Mississippi	Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP), Grade 5 (Math, Reading, Written Communication, Composite)	Reported as mean scaled scores for district and school

	Functional Literacy Exam (FLE), Grade 11 (Reading, Math, Written Communication, Composite)	Same procedure as BSAP
	Subject Area Testing Program (SATP), Algebra I	Same procedure as BSAP and FLE
	Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), Grades 4, 6, 8	Reported in terms of mean national normal curve equivalent for system and school.
North Carolina	California Achievement Test (CAT), Grades 3, 6, 8 (Reading/Language, Math)	Reported by percentage of students at each percentile in the district.
	N. Carolina Tests, Grades 3, 6, 8 (Writing, Social Studies, Science)	Reported for current year and past two years in percentiles
	NOTE: Writing test administered only at grades 6 and 8	
	North Carolina Tests, High School (Economics/ Legal/Politics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Physical Science, Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry)	Same reporting procedure as Grade 3, 6, 8 tests
	Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	Average scores by district
	Advanced Placement Examinations	Number of students scoring 3 or above
	Percentage of students in Grades 9-12 Earning 5 or more units toward graduation	
	Percentage of Graduates completing required UNC Admissions Courses	
Tennessee	Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), Grades 2 thru 8 and 10 (Reading, Language, Math, Science, Social Studies)	Formerly reported as average percentile at each grade level; now reported in terms of average gain over two years and percentage of gain (plus or minus) against national norm.
	Tennessee Proficiency Test (TPT), Grade 9	Reported as percentage of students passing test (required score of 70 percent)

Analysis of this table indicates that all five states use state-developed tests to measure aspects of student academic performance. All of the states except Tennessee report scores from at least one recognized national achievement test; e.g., Stanford Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, California Achievement Test. Test scores/ results are presented differently in each state, and in two states (Florida, North Carolina), indicators other than test scores are included as measures of performance.

Student Outcomes Reported

Table 1 also provides the information necessary for comparison of student outcomes reported in the five states. Florida reports percentages of students scoring below the 25th percentile and above the 75th percentile on the Grade Ten Assessment Test. Median scores on the ACT and SAT examinations are used. Georgia reports percentage of students by quartile on its Curriculum Based Assessment and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, but reports subject area test scores (TAP) in grade equivalents. Mississippi uses a mean scaled score reporting format for its BSAP, FLE and SATP testing programs, but the state reports Stanford Achievement Test scores in terms of what it calls a mean national normal curve equivalent. North Carolina reports percentages of students at each percentile level except for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (average district scores) and Advanced Placement Examination results (number of students scoring 3 or above). Tennessee reported average percentile score at each grade level for each test in its comprehensive Assessment program (TAP) until 1992-93 and the percentage of students passing the Tennessee Proficiency Test (scores of 70 percent or above). The reporting procedure has changed with the advent of the Tennessee Value Added Assessment Program (TVAAS).

Both Tennessee and North Carolina use test results to make summative evaluation decisions about school districts. However, each state

approaches its evaluation differently. The North Carolina report card provides four comparisons of student performance for each school system:

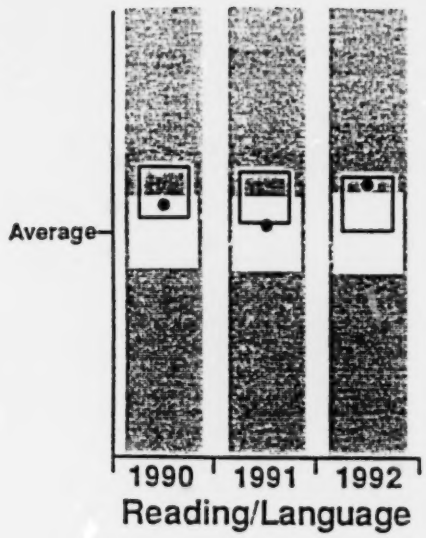
- comparison of current levels of student performance with those of previous years,
- comparison of performance of the school system with all other school systems in the state,
- comparison of performance of the school system with similar school systems in the state,
- comparison of current levels of student performance with state accreditation standards.

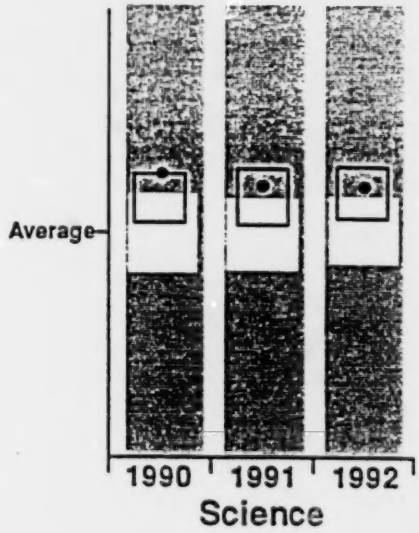
Some measures also allow comparison of the performance of a school system's students with that of students nationwide. In North Carolina's approach, school system and community characteristics are used to calculate an index of advantagement. This index, which takes the form of a positive or negative number, is the vehicle for comparison of educational outcomes in similar school districts. The comparison of student performance with state accreditation standards is accomplished by summarizing school system test scores into four curriculum areas (mathematics, reading/language, science, social studies), deriving a single system achievement score for each curriculum area and, ultimately, a single overall achievement score for the school system, a score representing achievement across all curriculum areas. It is then possible to determine whether student performance in a school system is average, below average or above average and to determine the system's level of achievement of each of 34 state performance standards which are the basis for school accreditation. Figure 1 provides examples.

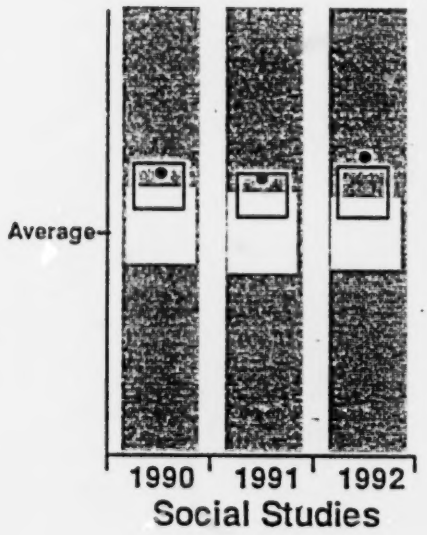
When fully implemented, Tennessee's value added assessment approach will result in rewards and penalties to school and school systems based on performance gains over a minimum of two years. The procedure used to compute gains is too complex to be fully explained here. In essence, estimated mean gain of a group of students in a specific subject is produced from mixed model equations. That gain is then compared with

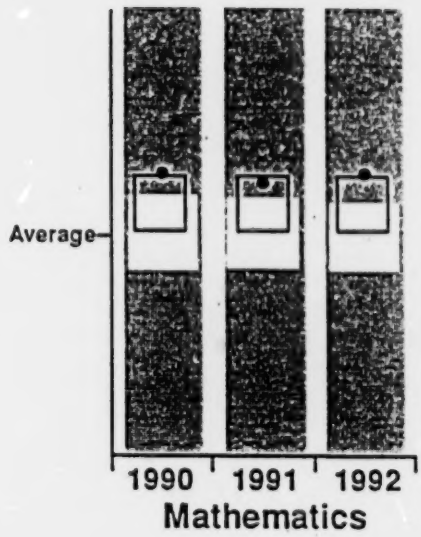
Figure 1. North Carolina Presentation of Achievement Data

Achievement by Subject Area

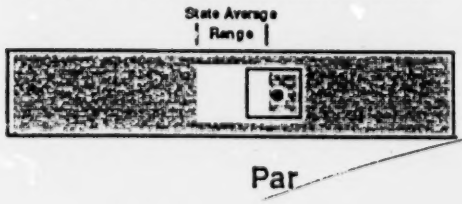








1991 Overall Achievement



1992 Overall Achievement

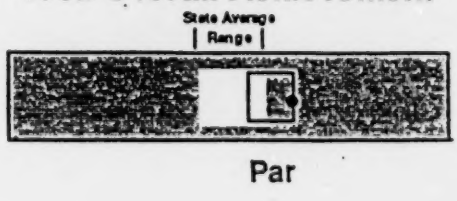


Figure 1 (continued)
North Carolina Presentation
of Achievement Data

BUNCOMBE COUNTY
1992 ACCREDITATION STATUS

		Standard	Criterion	Performance	Level of Compliance
1.	(1.1)	Attendance	94%	93.92	•
2.	(2.1)	5 Units of Credit for Graduation	80%	88.8	••••
3.	(2.2)	Entry to UNC Institutions	35%	51	••••
4.	(2.3)	Qualify for NC Scholars Program	10%	20.5	••••
5.	(2.4)	Voc. Ed. Unemployment Rate	≤ County	5.2	••••
		County Youth Unemployment		16.4	
		Follow-Up Survey Response Rate		89.8	
6.	(2.5)	Percent Certificates	≤ 3%	1.4	••••
7.	(3.1)	Compensatory Reading	1 NCE	8.4	••••
8.	(3.2)	Compensatory Math	1 NCE	.	
9.	(3.3)	Dropouts	≤ 2.4%	3.63	••••
10.	(4.1a)	CAT, 3rd Grade Reading	40-50%ile	55.4	••••
11.	(4.1b)	CAT, 3rd Grade Language	40-50%ile	60.5	••••
12.	(4.1c)	CAT, 3rd Grade Mathematics	40-50%ile	76.3	••••
13.	(4.2a)	CAT, 6th Grade Reading	40-50%ile	57	••••
14.	(4.2b)	CAT, 6th Grade Language	40-50%ile	59.5	••••
15.	(4.2c)	CAT, 6th Grade Mathematics	40-50%ile	69.5	••••
16.	(4.3a)	CAT, 8th Grade Reading	40-50%ile	61.6	••••
17.	(4.3b)	CAT, 8th Grade Language	40-50%ile	61.9	••••
18.	(4.3c)	CAT, 8th Grade Mathematics	40-50%ile	63.2	••••
19.	(4.4)	Writing Essay, 6th Grade	40%	46.7	••••
20.	(4.5)	Writing Essay, 8th Grade	40%	61.7	••••
21.	(4.6)	Science, 3rd Grade	40-50%ile	66	••••
22.	(4.7)	Science, 6th Grade	40-50%ile	60.2	••••
23.	(4.8)	Science, 8th Grade	40-50%ile	62.8	••••
24.	(4.9)	Social Studies, 3rd Grade	40-50%ile	65.6	••••
25.	(4.10)	Social Studies, 6th Grade	40-50%ile	55	••••
26.	(4.11)	Social Studies, 8th Grade	40-50%ile	58.4	••••
27.	(5.1)	Algebra I	40-50%ile	60.8	••••
28.	(5.2)	Algebra II	40-50%ile	60.1	••••
29.	(5.3)	Biology	40-50%ile	65.4	••••
30.	(5.4)	United States History	40-50%ile	56.4	••••
31.	(5.5)	Chemistry	40-50%ile	60	••••
32.	(5.6)	Geometry	40-50%ile	63.5	••••
33.	(5.7)	English	40-50%ile	54.2	••••
34.	(5.8)	Physics	40-50%ile	48.5	•••

SUMMARY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Standards Fully Met (••••)	31	93.9
Standards Met Level 1 (•••)	1	3
Standards in Warning Status (••)	0	0
Standards Not Met (•)	1	3

Accreditation Eligibility: Seventy-five percent of standards must be met at Level 1 (including "Warning Status") or Fully Met in order for the school system to be eligible for accreditation. For 1991-92, this means that 26 standards must be met by systems that offer Compensatory Mathematics and 25 standards must be met by systems that do not.

NOTES:

(a.) If performance is within the range of scores shown under the criterion (above), the level of compliance is met at Level 1. If performance meets the criterion for Level 1, but no improvement was made from the preceding years, the level of compliance is "Warning Status." If progress is not made for two consecutive years, the standard will be lost.

(b.) For Standard 2.4 to be met, the vocational education unemployment rate must be less than the county youth unemployment rate and the response rate to Item H of the Job Skill Completer Follow-Up Survey must be equal to or greater than 75 percent.

(c.) Standard 3.3 is met if the dropout rate is less than 2.4 percent, or if the number of dropouts is either 10 percent less than the previous year or 10 percent less than the average of the previous two years or 10 percent less than the average of the three years.

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national norm gains, and the relationship of local gains to national gains is determined using scale score points. Bar graphs vividly present to the school or school system its comparative gain at each grade level in relation to national norms. Figure 2 provides an illustration.

Levels of Outcome Data Reported

The five state report cards differ in the levels of information presented as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Levels of Data Presented In State Report Cards

State	Performance Data	School/District Characteristics
Florida	District Level School Level Grade Level*	District Level School Level
Georgia	District Level Grade Level*	District Level
Mississippi	District Level School Level Grade Level*	District Level
North Carolina	District Level School Level	District Level
Tennessee	District Level School Level Grade Level	District Level

*Grade level data provided for tests given only at specified levels.

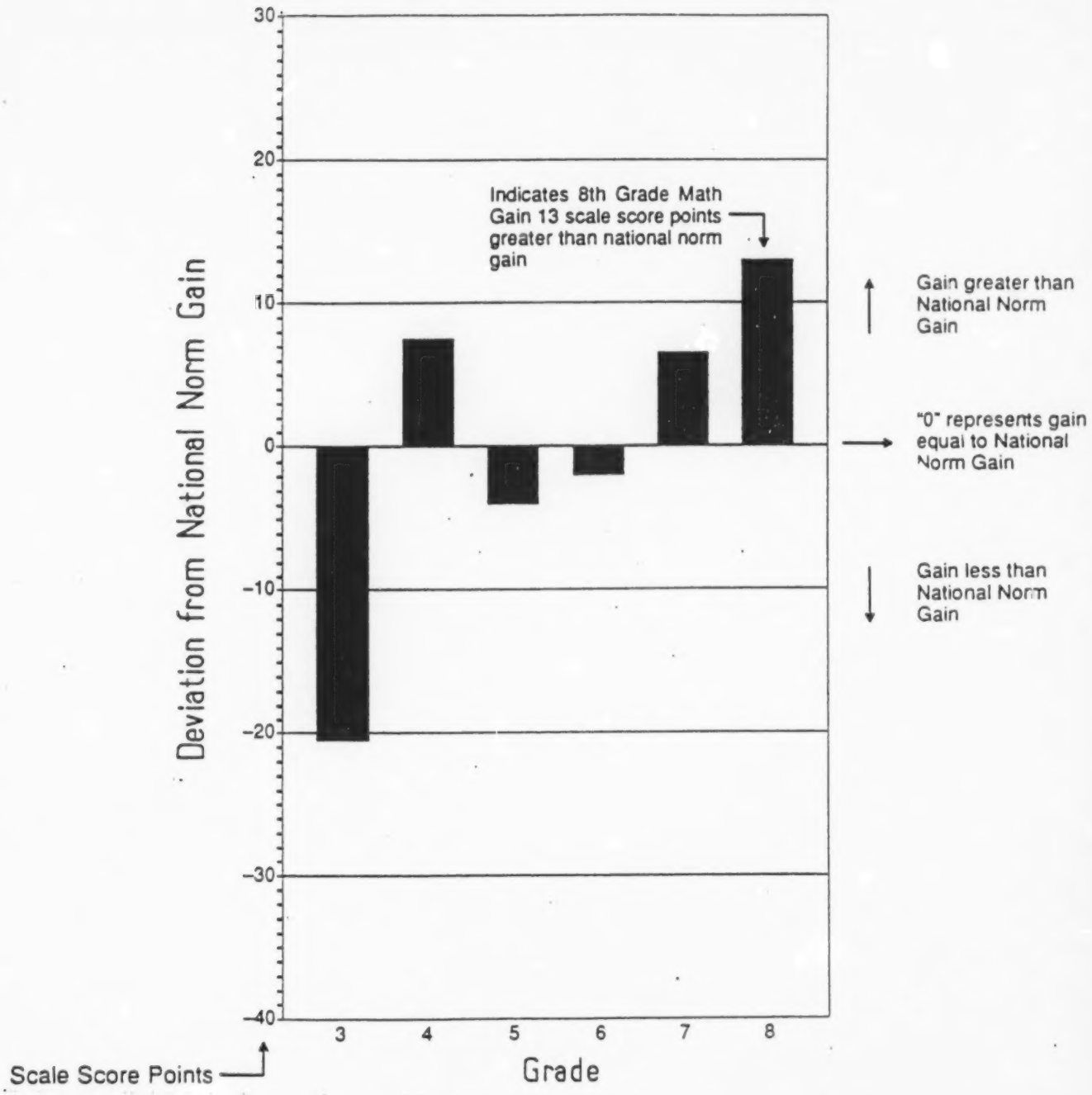
Only one state (Georgia) does not provide school level performance data, and only one state (Tennessee) provides grade level performance data for all grade levels two through ten. Only Florida provides information in its report cards about student and school characteristics at the school as well as the district level.

School and Community Characteristics

School and community characteristics presented in the five state report cards also differ. However the characteristics presented can be clustered in categories: student characteristics, school/district characteristics, financial characteristics of the community. Table 3 provides the comparison:

Figure 2. Tennessee Value Added Assessment Presentation

ILLUSTRATION Math



Based on 2 year Average.

Table 3: Student, School And Community Characteristics Identified In Report Cards

State	Student Characteristics	School/District Characteristics	Community/District Financial Characteristics
Florida	•Racial distribution (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian) •Percent free/reduced lunch •Percent gifted •Percent handicapped •Percent in federal compensatory programs •Percent limited English Proficient (by race) •Percent habitual truants	•Percent kindergarten retention •Percent first grade retention •Graduation rate •Student mobility (%) •Student attendance (%) •Percent students promoted, K-3 •Percent students promoted, 4-6 •Percent in school suspensions •Percent out of school suspensions •Percent corporal punishment •No full time teachers and staff •Racial/Ethnic composition of staff •Percent teachers by degree levels •Percent teachers by experience levels •Staffing ratios (pupils per teacher, pupils per administrator, pupils by librarian) •Instructional staff per administrator	•Per pupil expenditure •District funding by source (local, state, federal)

Georgia	•Percent free/reduced lunch	•School system size	
Mississippi	•Percent race (black, white) •Percent gender •Percent limited English proficient •Percent handicapped	•Average daily attendance	
North Carolina	•Number and percent race (American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Black, White) •Percent gifted •Percent handicapped •Percent in compensatory education programs •Percent free/reduced lunch •Percent absent more than 14 days	•Membership (number of students) •Average number of students per teacher •Percent teachers with graduate degrees •Number of high school completers •Number of vocational education completers •Number of NC scholars program course completers •Number of students taking AP exams •Number of students in grades 9-12 earning 5 or more units toward graduation •Number of graduates completing UNC required Admissions Courses	•Local per pupil expenditures •Total per pupil expenditures •Average local teacher salary supplement •Parent education level (percent 8th grade, 8-12, high school graduates, post high school)

Tennessee	•Percent free/reduced lunch •Percent in special education •Percent chapter I students	•Number of schools •Average daily membership •Percent student attendance •Percent enrollment change •Percent oversized classes •Percent elementary schools accredited by SACS •Percent educators on Career Ladder Levels II and III •Average professional educator salary •Percent diplomas granted (regular, honors, special education, certificate of attendance) •Percent students in vocational education courses	•Average expenditure per pupil •County per capita income

Analysis of Table 3 indicates that all five states report some range of student characteristics, and three states (Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee) report community/district financial characteristics. Georgia and Mississippi focus their reports on academic outcomes, presenting only a limited amount of additional information which they feel is needed to present and interpret test scores.

Statistical Procedures Used In Evaluating Data

As already reported in Table 1, the five state report cards analyzed use a variety of statistical procedures in reporting student outcomes. Florida reports percentile scores for its Grade Ten Assessment Test and

median school score for the ACT and SAT. Georgia uses quartiles for its Curriculum Based Assessment and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, but computes grade equivalents for its Tests of Achievement and Proficiency. Mississippi computes mean scaled scores for all tests except the Stanford Achievement Test for which national normal curve equivalents are computed. North Carolina determines percentile rankings for all test results except the SAT and Advanced Placement examinations which do not lend themselves to this analysis. Tennessee formerly reported mean percentile scores for each grade level, but now uses deviation from national norm gain.

None of the report cards studied report statistical analyses of the impact of student, school or community factors on student outcomes. In fact, there is no indication that statistical analyses of these relationships are being conducted. North Carolina states in its explanatory materials that the advantagement index provided in the report card is calculated using factors that research has shown to be related to school achievement. However, no identification of those specific factors or procedure for using them is provided.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Although the sample of report cards analyzed in this study is small, several generalizations can be made:

1. There is little commonality from state to state in the performance measures and indicators incorporated into current state report cards.

2. Procedures used in analyzing and presenting student outcome data are not consistent from state to state. They appear to represent the dictates of state policy or the particular bent of report card developers.

3. Student, school and community characteristics reported or used in interpreting data also vary from state to state. The three most commonly used factors are percentage of students on free/reduced lunch, student attendance (and its corollary student absence), and per pupil expenditures.

4. There is little attempt to determine relationships between student/school/community characteristics and student

performance. There appears to be a tacit assumption that the characteristics reported influence outcomes.

5. Early versions of state report cards tended to focus at the district/system level. These reports draw attention to school and grade level data.

6. While several of the reports provide for comparison with like schools and/or districts, there is no information provided that would offer educators and community leaders insights into the factors in similar schools that might be contributing to higher performance levels, where those exist. For example, there is no information about curriculum structure, instructional methodologies, educator professional development, or school organization and governance.

7. Only a few states (Florida and North Carolina in this study) are attempting to use factors other than test results as indicators of student performance.

V. IMPLICATIONS

Several implications emerge from the findings and conclusions of this study. We offer them as points for discussion.

The New Standards And Assessments Debate. When viewed in the context of the current effort to develop new standards and assessments that extend beyond state boundaries, this study suggests that much groundwork will need to be done before policymakers and educators are willing to "buy in" to regional or national frameworks and procedures. These report cards demonstrate clearly that each of several neighboring states has approached the task of assessing and portraying schooling and student performance independently and differently. It is uncertain that they will be willing to compromise their perspectives and practices in order to provide a "common view" of schools and student outcomes.

The Measurement of Student Performance. Without exception, each of the five states sampled in this study is using one or more state developed tests/test batteries in its assessment package. While there are good reasons for the development of these measures, one cannot help but acknowledge the time and costs expended by each state. Further, one wonders to what extent these state produced measures produce information that is any better than assessments produced for use nationally. The

argument has been that state produced tests more validly reflect the curricula within that state. Yet, teachers and administrators in many of the states sampled still question the alignment of the tests with their curricula. In light of current reform efforts, student and family mobility across state boundaries, and the tremendous costs involved in development of new assessments, at least one question must be posed, "Is it time for interstate collaboration? Can we really afford to reinvent the wheel in every state?"

Report Card Development. As demonstrated in this study, state report cards on schools typically portray school districts and schools through a variety of performance indicators and student, school, community characteristics. The tacit assumption is that the characteristics somehow impact performance. However, there is no indication of the actual influence of any characteristic or set of characteristics on the outcomes presented.

In a series of other papers, the authors have demonstrated that few of the characteristics usually presented have much impact on student academic achievement. In those studies, the factors that most commonly influence student performance are attendance and per pupil expenditure. However, even these factors influence performance differently at different grade levels.

Further, as indicated in the conclusions of the present study, there has been little attempt to build into report cards information that might be useful to educators desiring to improve performance in their schools. As a teacher or school administrator, I can compare the performance of my school with others, but I have no idea why their performance might be better.

In essence, it may be time to relook at the structure and content of school report cards. They can be an extremely useful tool for improvement, but that potential is not being reached.